

Ayn Rand

by Leonard Peikoff

A statement once made about a great philosopher is applicable to Ayn Rand: her works "exhibit, not 'cold thought,' but the passionate search for passionless truth."

Most men regard philosophy as an intellectual chess game of no consequence to their lives; they regard their own characters, their emotions, their values as unrelated to their ideas. One central key to Ayn Rand's achievement is her total rejection of these views. Ayn Rand holds that philosophy is the most crucially important subject, because it is philosophy that ultimately shapes men's characters, determines their values and thus moves the world. She holds that what man needs above all else is a philosophy for living on earth.

She has defined one. It is called Objectivism.

Cutting through the dilemmas, the contradictions, the dead ends that have dominated most of Western philosophy, Ayn Rand has formulated a comprehensive philosophic system, providing answers to the major problems of philosophy. In briefest essence, Objectivism upholds the supremacy of *reason* (as man's only means of acquiring knowledge and his only guide to action)—a new ethics of rational *selfishness* (which holds that each man should live for his own sake, neither sacrificing himself to others nor others to himself)—and *individualism* (with its political expression and consequence, the only *moral* social system: laissez-faire capitalism).

Today, drug-intoxicated intellectuals, in an orgy of irrationalism, stridently demand universal self-sacrifice, and vie with one another in producing schemes for its practical implementation, i.e., for the enslavement of man by the community, the collective, the state.

Many of these men are called radicals because they question some insignificant detail of conventional thinking or because they carry the basic premises of today's society to their ultimate conclusion. But Ayn Rand *is* a radical—a philosophic radical: she challenges the basic ideas of our collapsing world and provides the alternative.

Ayn Rand is a novelist. She performed one of the greatest intellectual revolutions of our time as part of her career. Her magnificent novels represent a

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union of philosophic originality and artistic power without parallel in our century. The Ayn Rand hero, plot and style have become internationally known: the hero—the man of independence, of purpose, of intransigent integrity; the plot—a brilliantly ingenious structure of unexpected yet ruthlessly logical events; the style—that union of luminous clarity, intellectual rigor and passionate beauty which is possible only to the great artist who is also a great philosopher.

To create a philosophic revolution is an extraordinarily rare achievement. To create a great work of art is almost as rare. To do both in the same work is a feat without precedent, yet that is what Ayn Rand has done in *Atlas Shrugged*.

Ayn Rand's career was made possible by her power of integration: her ability to see the logical relationships between ideas in the most diverse fields, and between ideas and men's actual life. Her mind grasps crucial connections between metaphysics and education, between epistemology and "ecology," between economics and the theory of sex. While most of today's intellectuals spread confusion by treating events as single, inexplicable concretes, Ayn Rand observes current events and identifies their deepest philosophic roots, or hears abstract philosophic theories and identifies what they would mean in actual practice—and thus is able to make an intelligible unity even of today's chaos.

Her works—ranging from plays and novels through historical essays and cultural commentaries to philosophic treatises—reflect the scope of her mind. Who but Ayn Rand could write a philosophical melodrama (*Night of January 16th*)—and a technical treatise on concept-formation that is studied by professors of philosophy around the country (*Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology*)?

We live in an age of synthetic celebrities manufactured by press agents and pressure groups. Ayn Rand has had no such assistance; she has achieved world fame in the face of the concerted opposition of today's entrenched ideological pressure groups.

Some intellectuals do not know what to think of Ayn Rand: they recognize that she does not fit into any of their standard categories, that she is saying something *new*—and they wait for others to tell them how to judge it.

The three most powerful ideological groups in today's world, however, do know what they think: the Church, the Communist Party and the Liberal Establishment are united in their frantic opposition to Ayn Rand; they recognize that her philosophy is the gravest threat to their power. They have fought against Ayn Rand all her life; they have fought by smear, by distortion, by misrepresentation, by attempting—when everything else failed—to smother her work in a blanket of silence.

Yet Ayn Rand has broken through. On her own, on the strength of her achievements, she has become an intellectual power in today's world, a fact which theorists of every stripe now recognize. Her works are used as texts in colleges around the country. Her admirers are progressively entering the graduate schools and the professions. Her lectures at college campuses are invariably attended by overflowing audiences. Her books have sold more than 8 million copies. Defying every fundamental premise of today's culture, Ayn Rand has succeeded in launching a nationwide philosophic movement.

Project what this requires. Project the courage, the integrity, the passion for thought and truth that make such an achievement possible. If you do, you will not have to ask: What is Ayn Rand like in person? You will know it.

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